

NEWS YOU CAN USE

E - Learning . g o v

By Eva Kaplan-Leiserson

Look out, world! Governments, often stereotyped as slow and behind the times, are signing on to e-learning.

Once used by a handful of people in state and national governments, e-learning is being viewed more strategically as an overall tool that can help government employees and constituents keep up with the fast pace of the knowledge economy. Sure, governments

may be a bit behind companies that have been doing e-learning for years, but they're ahead of many other companies that are still figuring out how to get involved. Here are some examples.

The World Bank. The international lending organization is made up of representatives from 180 member nations. Its learning arm, the World Bank Insti-

tute, has contracted with e-learning supplier Enspire Learning to design an interactive online training course for the World Bank Institute's Macroeconomics and Policy Assessment Skills Program. Simulations and multimedia tools will help keep World Bank staff and economists worldwide engaged. The online course will launch in winter 2002.

Illustration by Peter Bennett

Governments log on to e-learning.

The Commonwealth. A voluntary association of 54 nations that were once linked together in the British empire, the Commonwealth countries work towards international goals. At their spring 2002 meeting in Vancouver, British Columbia, the Commonwealth Ministers of Education directed the offshoot group Commonwealth of Learning to begin designing a virtual university that will serve primarily the small countries. The university will enable those nations to share information, form partnerships, and plan joint programs.

U.K. public sector. Giving a boost to the e-learning standards movement is Steve Molyneux, a member of the United Kingdom's e-learning strategy taskforce and head of

the Information and Communication Technology Research Centre at the Department for Education and Skills. Molyneux is calling for a public-sector e-learning standard that would save U.K. taxpayers money and lead to the implementation of a virtual university for civil servants. He asserts that U.K. government spending for e-learning is now being wasted because systems are incompatible.

U.S. military. In August, the U.S. Department of Defense announced a mammoth strategic plan to adapt the way the entire military is trained, in order to better prepare for joint operations. Just one of the many proposals is to develop a networked, live virtual environment in which troops can practice collaborating on



Bizz the buzz about small business

Did you know that half of the new companies launched in the United States and Canada fail within three years? If you're concerned about the viability of your small business, read on. These tips can help you decide whether your business is good to go or whether it's time to cut your losses.

Be prepared. When you start a business, you should include in your business plan criteria under which you'd fold. Then keep your eyes open; don't ignore warning signs because you're emotionally attached.

Watch the cash flow. If you're struggling to balance income and expenses every month, it could mean that your cash flow is too tight to keep the business running. Everyone has short months, but be alert to that trend.

Examine the qualitative. Some warning signs won't appear on a balance sheet. For example, an increase in customer complaints or a steady loss of customers may hint at problems with products or services.

Be honest with yourself and others. Don't delude yourself that things will turn around any minute when the data says otherwise. And repeat this 100 times: "I will not play with the numbers."

Look for excess. Do you have lots of employee turnover or large price cuts? Both are warning signs that something may be wrong.

Read your mood. If you're stressed and unenthusiastic about going to work in the mornings, it might not be worth fighting to keep the business afloat.

Don't panic if you spy some of those warning signs, but do evaluate your business's chance of success carefully. For second opinions, consult your lawyer and accountant. They can tell you if they think the business is in real trouble. Another good advisor? Your spouse.

Source/www.bcentral.com

Link You Can Use
www.sbba.com
 The Small Business Benefit Association offers a host of resources for small business owners.

More

The World Bank

enspirelearning.com/pr_07_10_02.jsp

The Commonwealth

col.org/consultancies/02virtualu.htm

U.K. public sector

vnunet.com/news/1134171

U.S. military

www.learningcircuits.org/2002/aug2002/newsbytes.html#aug1

U.S. agencies (Online Learning Center)

govexec.com/dailyfed/0602/062802b1.htm and geolearning.com/news/dsp_article.cfm?NewsID=57

U.S. agencies (communities of practice)

fcw.com/supplements/dwkm/2002/sup-meet-08-05-02.asp

various tasks. Suppliers had not been designated at press time.

U.S. federal agencies. To unify e-learning initiatives across the federal government and reduce redundancy, the U.S. government has developed a one-stop shop for selecting and delivering e-learning. The Gov Online Learning Center <» www.golearn.gov uses Geolearning's hosted LMS and content from Skillsoft, NetG, and Karta Technologies. The portal will be available 24/7, including round-the-clock technical support. Number of people served: 1.8 million.

U.S. agencies are getting into a different type of e-learning in a more grassroots way, perhaps because the concept and technology are newer. Agencies are using collaboration software to form communities of practice, bringing together federal workers to discuss an issue or solve a problem. One high-profile example of this: the U.S. State Department, which is using eRoom Technology's collaboration software to meet and develop economic policy.

<» www.learningcircuits.org for more on government e-learning.

Reality check
If you're as sick as a dog but drag yourself in to work, you may not be the model employee you think you are. AdvancePCS, provider of health improvement services, conducted more than 25,000 interviews and found that employees who show up with headaches, stomachaches, or similar complaints are costing employers more than US\$180 billion a year. The culprit is "presenteeism" (as opposed to absenteeism)—a state in which employees are at work but unable to perform fully. According to the study, pre-

senteism accounts for more than two-thirds of health-related lost-labor costs.

You might as well stay home with your chicken soup and soap operas.

<» *Source/CCH Human Resources Management Net News*

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SurveySays

What qualities do effective leaders have? That's the question the Society for Human Resource Management asked in its 2002 Global Leadership Survey. Responses demonstrated that organizations worldwide value similar characteristics. Most important traits for a leader, based on overall results:

performance, 85 percent

character, 82 percent

adaptability, flexibility, and persistence, each 78 percent

The numbers were a bit different for the United States, which has been rocked recently with corporate scandals.

Character took top billing, followed by performance, flexibility, and ethical standards.

The way leaders were developed:

external leadership development training

(universities, professional organizations, and so forth), 57 percent

internal leadership development training, 51 percent

temporary stretch assignments to develop new skills, 48 percent

international assignments to gain diverse experiences, 47 percent

The report is available for SHRM members <» shrm.org/surveys/results.